London rally draws tens of thousands to protest Gaza invasion

Our reporters
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An estimated 100,000 demonstrators took to the streets of London on Saturday to protest Israel's invasion of the Gaza strip in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The march was one of a number that took place across the UK. In Glasgow and Aberdeen, Scotland several thousand demonstrated despite heavy rain. Other demonstrations were held in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Dublin, Ireland.

The London protest, called under the banner of "justice and freedom" for Palestine, was organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War Coalition, which is supported by various pseudo-left groups such as Counterfire and the Socialist Workers Party.

Assembling at Prime Minister David Cameron's 10 Downing Street residence to march on the Israeli Embassy in Kensington, demonstrators chanted "Stop Israel's war crimes" and "End Israeli Apartheid". People were still arriving at the Embassy more than an hour after the protest had set off.

There they were confronted by thousands of police officers in riot gear who corralled participants behind metal barricades. As a result, more than 20 attendees fainted and two young children had to be rescued from being nearly crushed.

Addressing the rally, Respect MP George Galloway pointed to the disparity in the coverage of the 298 casualties of the Malaysia Airlines MH17 crash in eastern Ukraine, and the 300 Palestinians killed so far in Gaza.

"The 300 Palestinians are completely ignored by the same newspapers, by the same television stations and by the same political leaders who are threatening sanctions and war against Russia but who are supporting, with weapons and money and diplomatic political and media support, the Israeli killers", he said.

"Why the double standard? Why is the blood in Ukraine so much more noteworthy than the blood in Gaza?"

But the only solution held out by the rally organizers was to call for pressure on the Conservative-led government to impose sanctions on Israel and to demand that Israel adhere to international law.

The political bankruptcy of such demands was exposed just prior to the demonstration as a spokeswoman for the prime minister informed reporters that Cameron had issued a joint statement with US President Barack Obama defending Israel's right to bomb Gaza. "Both leaders reiterated their support for Israel's right to take proportionate action to defend itself from the barrage of rocket attacks from Gaza", she said.

Speakers also sought to bolster illusions in the Labour Party, despite the fact it is responsible for historic crimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Among the speakers was Labour MP Diane Abbott, who said, "I am here to show solidarity with the people in Gaza. We call for an end to the occupation and justice for Palestinians."

Speaking at the same time, at the Labour Party's policy conference, her party leader Ed Miliband backed the Israeli onslaught against Gaza, whilst shedding a few crocodile tears for those Palestinians killed so far.

"I have seen for myself the fear in Israel from the unjustified and appalling rocket attacks from Hamas in Gaza", Miliband said. "I defend Israel's right to defend itself against rocket attacks," he continued, even while he complained that he could not "explain, justify or defend the horrifying deaths of hundreds of Palestinians, including children and innocent civilians."

Socialist Equality Party members distributed the

International Committee of the Fourth International statement against the Israeli invasion of Gaza, which was received warmly by protesters, many of whom had fled from the catastrophes created by imperialism in their own countries.

Raja, a medical doctor, said she and her entire family were attending the rally. She tearfully explained, "We are called terrorists. We are Muslims and the UK is our home. We stand with Jews, Christians, whites and blacks against a Jewish state that promotes violence. Judaism does not advocate violence. We all want peace. It is Zionism that is promoting segregation, racism and genocide. When I look into the eyes of Palestinian children playing football on the beach in Israel, with guns pointed at their heads, I think to myself, enough of Zionism. Zionism must go!" Raja said she was upset by the fact that her British co-workers had been intimidated by their employer not to attend the rally. She said, "That is totally undemocratic!"

Seta, a worker in London, said she came to the rally to "protest the slaughter of the Palestinians".

"It is time that the Western powers stop colluding with each other and with Israel against the Palestinians," she said. "If the situation in Gaza were happening in the West, the Western powers would put an immediate end to the fighting. But the West is turning a blind eye to the atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank because big business isn't affected by the fighting. If corporate interests were seriously threatened, the fighting would stop."

Zeyn said he was attending because his "mother is Palestinian and the injustice in Gaza is an injustice to everyone." He went on, "We have the right to live. What is happening in Gaza is akin to a "Western-backed apartheid state."

"Obama makes me sick. He is the puppet head of the American military regime. Israelis are killing Palestinians with American bombs."

Zeyn's parents grew up in Lebanon, as Palestinian refugees, and they told him that they witnessed unimaginable horror, including seeing people burnt alive with bombs and limbs blown off. He said they were able to escape but have never forgotten.

Regarding the way forward he said, "I don't know, it's difficult. The way forward may be a two-state solution. Although I really think that a two-state solution won't work long term because no government is set up to support the masses, the UK government included, Tory or Labour."

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